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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN RELATIONS ACT

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their April 11-13 news coverage on a series of government-organized events commemorating the 100th birthday of the late President Chiang Ching-kuo; on the developments in cross-Straits relations and the controversy over Taiwan's plan to sign the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) with China; and on Taiwan's bid to become an observer at the World Health Assembly (WHA) this year. The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" front-paged a banner headline April 13 reading "Cross-Straits Consensus: Taiwan to Join WHA as an Observer." The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" also front-paged a banner headline April 13 reading "US Campaigning to Get Taiwan WHA Seat."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) remained the focus of several editorial pieces, as April 10 marked its thirtieth anniversary. An op-ed in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" criticized the KMT for working with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to render the TRA powerless. The article posed the question as to what strategy Washington will come up with if the authorities in both Taipei and Beijing were to request jointly that the United States weaken or even abolish the TRA. A separate "Liberty Times" op-ed cited a recent article by former AIT Chairman Richard Bush on the thirty-year-old TRA and criticized the China hands in Washington for allegedly looking down at the local leaders who insist on Taiwan's identity and labeling them as "sabotaging the status quo," and for allegedly smearing the democratic movements that challenge the one-China policy as "populist" movements. An op-ed in the pro-unification "United Daily News" urged Taiwan to maintain and reinforce its influence on the United States and China when the two big countries are allegedly seeking to establish a coordination mechanism to manage the international system. End summary.

A) "KMT and CCP Work Together to Render the Taiwan Relations Act Powerless"

Lo Chih-cheng, associate professor at Soochow University's Department of Political Science, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (4/11):

"... One of the most important objectives of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) is to ensure peace, security and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and the Act also lays out the legal foundation and political commitment for the United States to provide Taiwan with defensive weapons. It states clearly in the Act that any attempt to use 'non-peaceful means' to resolve Taiwan's future will threaten peace and security in the Pacific [region] and will thus cause serious concern on the part of the United States.

"The question is: Both China's current strategic goals toward Taiwan and the core of the Ma Administration's mainland policy are aimed at pushing Taiwan's future toward the direction of unification step by step under the guise of peace, security and stability. Such an approach of 'peacefully altering the status quo' and 'incremental style of unification,' however, has become an important matter that is difficult for the TRA to deal with in addition to coping with the

'non-peaceful means.' ... As a result, if what the world had been concerned about over the past few years was whether Washington would be willing to fulfill faithfully the regulations listed in the TRA, then the biggest test for TRA since Ma Ying-jeou assumed office would be whether Taipei is willing to await or further persuade Washington proactively to carry out its commitments as spelt out in the TRA.

"The consistent argument of the Ma Administration is that it hopes that cross-Straits relations and Taiwan-U.S. relations can develop simultaneously. But a key question that is unavoidable and that China will surely force Taiwan to face is: If [Taiwan] were to make a zero-sum choice between cross-Straits relations and Taiwan-U.S. relations, what kind of policy decision would Ma make? Given the Ma Administration's current strategic thinking of 'cross-Straits relations overriding everything else,' the answer is self-evident. The TRA, having been passed thirty years ago, is facing an unprecedented change in the [political] climate nowadays. What Washington needs to ponder perhaps is not how to fulfill the Act, but what strategy it will adopt should the authorities of both Taipei and Beijing jointly request that the United States weaken or even abolish the TRA."

B) "Taiwan's Democracy Disrupting the United States?"

Lai I-chung, Executive Committee member of the Taiwan Thinktank, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (4/13):

"Prior to the thirtieth anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), former AIT Chairman Richard Bush said in an article that he believes that the premise for the security commitments defined by the TRA was that governments of both Taiwan and the United States share a common strategic viewpoint. Bush also cited Taiwan's democratization and the rise of China as two major factors that interfered with the two countries' [efforts] in maintaining their common strategic viewpoint. ...

"Bush's article mentioned the two major factors that disrupt the United States and Taiwan [from sharing] a common strategic viewpoint, but the context of the article clearly points out that Taiwan's democratization was the factor, because it has generated the Taiwan identity [issue] and a 'new concept to ensure [Taiwan's] future.' Such a practice of treating Taiwan's democracy as a problem rather than the precondition for resolving the problem is very common among the China hands in Washington D.C. For example, Bush believes that 'with China's rise, the common interests shared between the United States and China have been increasing every day,' and [he] is worried that Taiwan's democracy will challenge the fundamental interests of the People's Republic of China, creating hurdles for U.S.-China cooperation. These China hands look down at the [Taiwan] leaders who insist on Taiwan's identity [and label them] as those who seek to sabotage the status quo, and they smear the democratic [movements] that challenge the one-China [policy] as populist [movements]. ...

"Taiwan is in no position to say anything about which strategy the United States should adopt, and Bush, who has an intimate relationship with the Obama Administration, also revealed in his article Washington's eager mentality to break away from Taiwan in order to befriend China. Bush used to interact and sympathize with the opposition parties in Taiwan when the island was under the Martial Law. Yet with Bush becoming like this, the attitudes of other China hands are quite evident. ... Bush's article explained why, even though Taiwan's freedom and democracy are in regression, [AIT Chairman] Raymond Burghardt still endorsed the Ma Administration on behalf of the United States. ...

C) "The Wax and Wane of the United States and China; [Taiwan's] Self-Protection Strategy Needs to Be Transformed Again"

Chen Hsin-chih, Associate Professor of the Department of Political Science at National Cheng Kung University, opined in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (4/12):

"Thirty years ago, at the time when the U.S.-China-Taiwan situation was disadvantageous to Taiwan, Taiwan helped to bring about the Taiwan Relations Act, which assured Taiwan's security and political

and economic interests. With a recent structural transformation of China and the United States walking toward a coordination mechanism, it is a top priority for Taiwan to establish actively its comprehensive influence on China's Taiwan policy in an attempt to assure Taiwan's overall interests in the future. ...

"However, since there is already a structural change in terms of the comparative power between the United States and China, it is likely that the United States' goodwill toward Taiwan will end up like nothing but lip service. Even if the United States takes unilateral actions favorable to Taiwan, the effects [of these actions] might be compromised significantly still. Second, China and the United States' joint management of the international crises through a coordination mechanism will limit the possibility of Taiwan's adopting international means in order to maintain its national interests. ... Third, Taiwan, on the periphery of the United States and China's sphere of influence, will definitely become an issue whenever the United States and China seek to define their sphere of influence and interest in the future. ..."

YOUNG